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Alternative Paths for Working Life Reform? A Comparison of European and East Asian Development Strategies

Tuomo Alasoini*

This paper expands the discussion on working life reform from the well-known European examples to cover recent developments in East Asia as well. A comparison between two European (Finland and Ireland) and two East Asian (Singapore and South Korea) workplace development strategies is carried out by making use of Naschold's model that he developed in the early 1990s. The main question is how are the macro-level differences in the developmental role of the state and the micro-level differences in the systems of industrial relations and human resource management reflected in the strategies and what policy implications might be drawn from the analysis. At the end, the paper also compares each country's strategy in relationship to its own earlier historical development and aims to analyse how radical are the strategy choices that have been made.

Key words: development strategy, policy learning, work organization, working life reform, workplace innovation

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1. Introduction

Academic interest in publicly-funded working life reform has so far almost exclusively focused on European countries, such as Germany and the Nordic countries, in which, in recent years, several workplace development initiatives have been carried out (e.g. Alasoini et al. 2005; Arnkil 2008; Brödner/Latniak 2003; Gustavsen 2007; 2008; Riegler 2008). This paper aims to expand the conceptual and geographical scope of current discussion by taking a look at new initiatives that have recently been taken outside Europe. There are two major reasons, one related to the macro level and another one to the micro level, why a comparison of national workplace development strategies in European and East Asian countries might be useful for policy learning.

Firstly, the institutional environment in which companies operate and in which labour policy is implemented is of great significance for the evolution of practical solutions. This environment is made up of many historical and cultural layers. The content and form of workplace development is affected by who the central collective actors are, and by how their mutual relationships are structured. The main collective actors are usually governments and government agencies, employers' associations and trade unions, workplaces, consultants and research groups and their networks and professional associations. Major differences between industrialized Western European and East Asian countries have been found, particularly in the developmental role of the state and in the overall welfare regimes. According to O'Riain (2000), in the case of the bureaucratic East Asian variant of the developmental state, as represented by Japan and the "tiger economies", the objective of economic modernization overrides political reform and there prevails close social ties between coherent state bureaucracy and domestic business owners and managers. In the more flexible variant that is characteristic of most European developmental states (whether liberal, conservative or social-democratic), the central government plays a less interventionist role in the market while the state administration is built on a more loosely-coupled organizational model in which individual agencies have more autonomy in forming alliances with a diverse range of social groups, including various innovation networks. In a similar vein, Holliday (2000) states that the welfare regimes of industrialized

East Asian countries are characterized by a "productivist" ethos, making them subordinate to the overriding objective of economic development. It is, however, an open matter how enduring these differences will be in the new phase of global capitalism and to what extent they only reflect the shorter "developmental time" of East Asian countries compared with the more mature European regimes. For example, Schmidt (2008) argues that these differences are presently levelling out as many European countries are moving in the direction of productivism and many East Asian countries, in turn, are increasingly adopting non-productivist elements.

Secondly, despite the fact that there are significant differences between both European countries and East Asian countries in workplace industrial relations (IR) and human resource management (HRM) practices, one could argue that these differences are overshadowed by the much greater differences in these matters between these two groups of nations. Many catching-up East Asian nations have lately become increasingly exposed to the global economy. However, empirical studies clearly demonstrate that the adoption of US or European influences by companies in East Asian countries has not led to a greater convergence between them and their western counterparts but the emergence of hybrid people-management systems, in which aspects of traditional US and European and East Asian systems (many of the latter originating in Japan) have combined into new configurations (Chia et al. 2007; Kuruvilla/Erickson 2002; Zhu et al. 2007).

All in all, there are good reasons to expect that, despite certain converging trends, a comparison of workplace development strategies between European and East Asian countries would show significant differences in many important aspects, including the role played by the government and the importance given to issues such as employee participation and the quality of working life. This paper makes use of Naschold's (1994) "best-practice model" as the framework for analysing national strategies for workplace development and innovation in different countries. This model, made in the early 1990s, is based on an analysis of six industrialized countries (Australia, Germany, Japan, Norway, Sweden and the USA). The model employs six generic principles that Naschold considers crucial for the social impact of national strategies and because of its comprehensive approach, regardless of some of

its inherent problems (Alasoini forthcoming), it is a rare exception among analyses of workplace development strategies.

This paper examines two European countries (Finland and Ireland) and two East Asian countries (Singapore and South Korea), which have in recent years adopted a systematic, programme-based strategy for the advancement of workplace innovation. The main question is how are the macro-level differences in the developmental role of the state and the micro-level differences in the systems of IR and HRM reflected in the strategies and what policy implications might be drawn from the analysis. In addition to comparing the four strategies and assessing their strengths and weaknesses, the paper also develops the Naschold model.

The analysis was carried out between 2007 and 2008. The empirical material comprises an analysis of the literature and websites and interviews with the key persons involved in the implementation of the strategies (see below for more details). Increased activity in recent years is characteristic of the four national contexts included in this study as well as the position of a "newcomer" in this area, in comparison to countries such as Germany, Norway and Sweden, in which the development of new forms of work organization and social innovations in working life in general entered the policy agenda as early as in the 1960s and 1970s (Den Hertog/Schröder 1989). An additional interesting issue from a policy learning point of view is to what extent the "newcomers" have been able to overcome the problems that weakened the social impact of national workplace development strategies in Naschold's empirical analysis from the early 1990s.

This paper starts with a presentation of the model and how it was elaborated in the course of the study. The next section presents the methodology and empirical material used in the study. Thereafter, the four national strategies are described and analysed. Finally, the paper discusses the observations in the light of the conceptual framework.

2. Naschold's model

As noted above, Naschold's (1994) model employs six generic principles. In the following, the paper presents the six principles and elaborates them for the purpose of empirical analysis:

Firstly, Naschold argues that the strategic justification for a workplace development strategy should arise primarily from macro-level industrial policy issues rather than the IR system or the R&D system. Without an adequate link with macro-level industrial policy issues and, consequently, with the strategic development goals of companies, there is a danger that workplace development could easily remain simply a way of intervening reactively with various "corrective" measures, for instance, in the problems caused by new technologies or production models. Development that originates one-sidedly from the problem settings of the IR system carries the danger of producing conservative solutions for the economic, workplace and occupational structure. The main problems are considered in a traditional way: from the perspective of structures that currently exist but are gradually disappearing. As a consequence, development may not be able to support the emergence of new, evolving structures. The key question, then, is how to integrate the promotion of workplace innovation into broader industrial policy and innovation policy decision making.

Secondly, on the programme and project level, the aim should be to attain an international or global standard, rather than settling for a national or local standard. This dimension, however, can be examined from two different perspectives. Mechanically interpreted, it contains the idea that some kind of definable international standard exists that should be used as a reference when creating objectives for development. Naschold's own view is that in different periods of time there exist production models, linked to national structures, that are "hegemonic" in their productivity potential and that create a kind of standard. An example from the early 1990s was the lean production model, originating in Japan. According to another, more constructivist interpretation (which is followed in this paper), it is important to monitor developments elsewhere in general with an open mind and to pick out the ideas of

most benefit. This interpretation holds that innovations are typically hybrids, mixing ingredients from different sources (Latour 1993). The programmes and projects of other countries can be an important source of ideas and inspiration for other countries and their workplaces, giving them a boost of confidence, but ultimately all programmes and projects are local configurations.

Thirdly, Naschold argues that in development operations the aim should be a type of indirect intervention that combines simultaneous design and process orientation and broad workplace-level participation as opposed to traditional design solutions provided by experts or centralized bargaining solutions by the social partners. In design-oriented approaches, the role of external expertise is to explore the existing and/or the possible future condition and features of the phenomenon in question (e.g. work organization) by mirroring them against different theories or models of design. In process-oriented approaches, external expertise is used to assist the workplace concerned to find proper ways of implementing participatory processes of change. Design orientation is characteristic of conventional academic research and most development approaches. According to Naschold, in national strategies this division should be bridged, and approaches with simultaneous design and process orientation should be deployed in a more balanced manner. The model also emphasizes the significance of broad workplace-level participation in development, as opposed to ready-made "top down" solutions provided by R&D experts or the social partners. As an element of broad participation, also employee influence and gender and age diversity in the goal setting of project activities are included in the framework of this study.

An advanced national development infrastructure which comprises a large number of experts is the fourth underpinning element of the model. Naschold considers it very important to pool different kinds of expertise at the national level to support development strategies and not to utilize solely micro-level approaches. Development programmes are in and of themselves a means for bringing various players and diverse bases of knowledge together, in the manner Naschold intended. The key question then is this: How consciously do the programmes strive to create new knowledge that would be relevant beyond the immediate application context of the programme too and to

strengthen the development infrastructure? In modern polycentric societies, there are usually several innovation centres, of which no one can claim to have superior knowledge or monopolize knowledge forever (Fricke 1994). New useful knowledge is generated through dialogue between various innovation centres in society rather than by "trickling" information from "the top down" or from "the core" to "the periphery". In workplace development, innovation centres typically comprise, in addition to workplaces, universities, research and educational institutes, consulting firms and development agencies, labour market organizations, public authorities, professional associations and, in some cases, even social movements.

Networking between players on the micro level, instead of stand-alone development projects, is the fifth feature of the model. This was also an area in which Naschold felt that Japan was clearly ahead of other countries in the comparison. According to him, the success of the Japanese quality movement in creating a nationwide quality improvement network at this time was a stark contrast to the failure of the Western programmes to promote the spread of new forms of work organization. In this study, horizontal networking is considered important, not only for the sake of information dissemination, but for the sake of knowledge creation too.

The sixth dimension concerns the adequacy of programme resources in relation to the aims of the programme. The financial budget, the number and expertise of the staff and the time span reserved for programme activities form the three critical resources for programmes in the model. In this study, the discussion of resources is expanded to cover, in addition to *material* resources (see above) devoted to development, *intellectual* resources (programme visions, guiding principles and development concepts) and *social* resources (capabilities to harness different networks and mechanisms for transfer into use of development) as well.

3. Methodology and empirical material

This paper studies programmes as embodiments of national workplace development strategies. Finland and Ireland were chosen to the study as two showcases of European countries, in which new major activities were

launched in recent years on the initiative of the government. Finland was an evident choice for the study, because the author has a long experience in working in Finnish programmes in this area. In the Finnish case, the object of analysis is the Workplace Development Programme TYKES. The information predominantly derives from the interim evaluation study of the TYKES programme (Arnkil 2008) and the author's own experience-based knowledge on the programme. Ireland was selected to the study through existing personal contacts within the EU-funded WORK-IN-NET project (2004-2009) in which both the Finnish and Irish programme management agencies are represented (Zettel 2005). The object of analysis here is the Irish Workplace Innovation Fund and its broader policy framework, the National Workplace Strategy. The information derives from an analysis of the literature, a trawl through the websites, contacts with the Irish officials on several occasions and a visit to Ireland in December 2007. During the visit eight meetings were arranged, comprising interviews of 14 persons from different organizations involved in the implementation of the strategy. Originally, gathering the information on Ireland was carried out as part of a broader benchmarking task within the WORK-IN-NET project (Alasoini et al. 2008).

Singapore was chosen to the study based on a literature survey as the most fully-fledged example of an East Asian country with a holistic approach to skills enhancement and promoting functional flexibility of labour (Ashton et al. 2003; Kuruvilla/Erickson 2002). Three programme entities – the ADVANTAGE! scheme, the People Developer framework, and the Innovation and Quality Circle programme – are taken into closer scrutiny as an illustration of the Singaporean strategy. In Singapore too, the information was gathered as part of a benchmarking task of the WORK-IN-NET project. In addition to an analysis of the literature and websites, data was obtained through visits to two state agencies in Singapore in May 2007. South Korea was chosen as an example of another East Asian country in which a programme-based approach for the promotion of workplace innovation was recently launched and in which the emphasis in flexibility strategies is laid on both numerical and functional flexibility in labour deployment, as opposed to many other East Asian countries which have lately centred on numerical flexibility alone (Kuruvilla/Erickson 2002). The object of analysis is the New

Paradigm Programme of the New Paradigm Centre, an affiliate to the Korea Labour Institute. The information consists of a literature survey, visits of several delegations from South Korea to Finland over the past few years and a study visit to South Korea in October 2008. During the visit, meetings were arranged with representatives of three state agencies.

4. Programmes and their contexts

4.1 Finland

Finland is a sparsely populated country with 5.3 million inhabitants that has succeeded in making the transition from a raw materials-based growth pattern into a knowledge-intensive pattern within a short space of time, while also retaining its existing framework as a welfare state (Benner 2003; Castells/ Himanen 2002). According to the European Innovation Scoreboard of 2007, for example, Finland ranks among the three top performers, together with Sweden and Switzerland. However, workplace development entered the Finnish policy agenda later than in the other Nordic countries. The first publicly-funded national programmes started only in 1993 and 1996, at the aftermath of a severe economic recession, as the National Productivity Programme and the Finnish Workplace Development Programme (TYKE) were launched. In 2004, the two programmes were joined together under a new six-year "umbrella", entitled as the Finnish Workplace Development Programme (TYKES). In 2008, coordination of the TYKES programme was transferred from the Ministry of Labour to the Finnish Funding Agency for Technology and Innovation (Tekes), indicating that the policy rationale for promoting workplace innovation in Finland is increasingly expanding from the IR framework in which the social partners are the major players to an integrated and permanent part of a broader industrial and innovation policy framework as well. A new guiding principle in the Finnish innovation policy debate is the notion of "broad-based innovation policy", which is based on a systematic approach, which unleashes the potentials of individuals and communities, which has a strong demand and user orientation, and which is global in its orientation. According to the new national innovation strategy that the Finnish Government adopted in autumn 2008, a better balance be-

tween technological and social innovation (including workplace innovation) will be searched for the future.

The vision of the TYKES programme is that by 2009 "Finland will have a network of expertise for work organization development which creates national competitive advantage and which effectively promotes qualitatively sustainable productivity growth", i.e. productivity growth which simultaneously improves the quality of working life in a manner that also encourages employees to stay on the job for longer (Alasoini 2004). The programme starts with the premise that productivity growth in Finland will depend to an increasing extent on innovations in the future, but at the same time new effort should be launched to counteract the expected fall in the supply of labour resulting from a rapid ageing of the population, which will undermine the prospects of economic growth and maintaining the preconditions for the welfare state. The most important issue in helping people cope and continue at work longer is the improvement in the quality of working life, such as employees' opportunities for learning and exerting an influence at work and employee well-being.

The programme's main forms of activity are to support projects, to disseminate information and to reinforce expertise on workplace development. The majority of projects are development projects, which start on the initiative of workplaces. The projects should aim at sustainable productivity growth, as described above, and they should be implemented in close cooperation between management and personnel. The most common targets of the projects are the development of work processes, work organization and HRM practices. In addition to development projects, TYKES also funds research-oriented method development projects and broader learning networks to foster long-term cooperation between workplaces and R&D institutes. The total number of projects in December 2008 was 977. Nearly 2/3 of funding is granted to projects in private enterprises where the focus is on growth-oriented SMEs.

TYKES projects are characterized by a diversity of development approaches and the programme in itself is dominated by a clear process orientation, as opposed to design orientation. In the projects, more emphasis is laid on the promotion of collaborative local processes than searching for ready-

made "best practices". Also characteristic of the Finnish approach is that all sectors of the economy are involved in the programme and a deliberate effort is made to boost cooperation between researchers from universities and research institutes and consultants in the projects. In Arnkil's view, the TYKES programme has made significant progress in promoting horizontal networking between workplaces and reinforcing the national pool of experts. On the other hand, he considers that the programme mechanisms for dissemination and transfer are "for the most part, still rather linear" (Arnkil 2008, 49), seriously questioning the programme's success in mainstreaming and bringing about sustainable, larger-scale reform in Finnish working life.

4.2 Ireland

The Irish "rags to riches" success story during the last 20 years has been supported by many intertwining factors, both exogenous and endogenous. These include substantial foreign direct investments, building of indigenous innovation networks, an accelerated supply of well-educated young labour, and transfers from the EU. In addition, the creation of a stable macroeconomic, financial and IR environment, based on political and social consensus that is embodied in the social partnership framework since 1987, fostered Ireland's adaptation to the conditions of international competition (Hastings et al. 2007; Smith 2005). Today the Irish Republic with a population of 4.3 million is one of the leading countries in terms of economic prosperity and quality of life.

In 1997, the government established a special organization, re-established four years later as the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP), to support workplace change and innovation through partnership. In 2003, the government requested the NCPP to establish a special, broad-based "Forum on the Workplace of the Future" which resulted in the development of a National Workplace Strategy (NWS) two years later. The NWS aims to reinforce the domestic base of innovation, decrease dependence on imported technology and foreign sources of innovation, increase the role of workplace innovation in the national system of innovation and help Ireland to become a "technology maker" instead of a "technology taker" (Forum on the Work-

place of the Future 2005). The NWS also defines nine characteristics that need to be developed in Ireland's workplaces. According to the vision, the workplace of the future should be agile, customer-centred, knowledge-intensive, responsive to employee needs, networked, highly productive, involved and participatory, continually learning and proactively diverse.

One of the 42 recommendations included in the NWS was to establish a dedicated fund to promote workplace innovation. The three-year Workplace Innovation Fund (WIF) was unveiled by the Prime Minister in 2007. The fund is administrated by Enterprise Ireland, a state development agency focused on transforming the Irish industry, and it is positioned as an additional strand to another fund, the Productivity Improvement Fund (since 2008 re-established as the Growth Fund). By October 2008, the WIF had granted funding to 26 projects in private enterprises under four headings: building strategic capacity for change, working in partnership, building employee commitment and loyalty to a better workplace, and introducing new HR processes to support the business. The WIF funds initiatives by the social partners relating to the NWS and national campaigns to raise awareness among Irish employers and employees and their representatives too.

The NWS and the social partnership framework form the policy context for the activities. The main motivation behind the strategy is to "trickle down" the spirit of social partnership from the macro level to the micro level; there exists a wide gap between these two levels. The promotion of social partnership at the micro level is complicated by variations in corporate culture, IR that are based on voluntarism and, recently in particular, the increasing amount of companies that rely on immigrant labour. The incidence of formal partnership agreements involving unions is only 4% in Irish business enterprises, but the figure rises to 19% if one also considers informal partnership-style agreements between management and employee representatives; in manufacturing and among 50+ companies the incidence is considerably higher (Williams et al. 2004). Enterprise Ireland has been very design-oriented in its project funding, which previously focused solely on technology development and training, but the WIF has introduced process-oriented elements with its emphasis on employee participation and social partnership. Funding by the WIF is not very inclusive; it is limited to exporting SMEs.

The project criteria as such do not intentionally promote development of the R&D infrastructure, and the experts that work in the projects are trainers or consultants. Dissemination of "good practices" and networking between companies is promoted by case studies, seminars, training, assessment studies, information sharing on the Internet and campaigns. The tools in use in Ireland seem quite conventional. On the other hand, the NWS has a strong institutional infrastructure backing it up. It enjoys high-level political support, and a wide group of state agencies and labour market organizations are involved in its implementation, helping to bring about positive publicity about strategy goals and spread information on project results. For example, Enterprise Ireland has at its disposal extensive networks, both nationally and internationally. The NWS is meant to be an evolving process, with no predetermined cut-off point, indicating that the promotion of workplace innovation has entered the Irish policy agenda to stay.

4.3 Singapore

The city-state of Singapore with a population of 4.6 million is today one of the most competitive countries in the world. Singapore's standard of living, measured by per capita GDP, is around the West European average and the second highest in Asia after Japan. The fast economic growth in the country in past decades has been based on an open economy and multinational companies, unlike the case in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. Singapore also differs from these economies in its income distribution, which is very unequal and more like the USA (Koh/Mariano 2006; Low 2006).

Singapore has adopted in recent years an active, nationalist and government-led approach to workforce and workplace development as part of a wider strategy to promote a shift from an investment-driven to an innovation-driven growth pattern. The approach can be described as a mosaic made up of several inseparable and mutually supported parts. Because of this mosaic-like character, it is not easy to describe the whole, much less its detail (Ashton et al. 2003; Brown et al. 2001). In general, the approach built up for developing workforce and workplaces in Singapore can be characterized as integrated, inclusive, need- and demand-based, motivated and dynamic. Characteristic of

the approach is also reliance on numerous standards for which certifications and awards are granted. For example, People Developer (PD) is a certificate of good personnel practices within a larger People Excellence concept, which is in turn part of the still broader Business Excellence framework. To gain the PD certificate, a business must have been awarded at least 400 points out of 1,000 in the relevant assessment. In the area of quality, service capability and innovation development there are similar systems. In May 2007, the PD certificate had been granted to over 600 organizations, including both businesses and public bodies, both large and small organizations, and multinationals as well as indigenous companies. Another example is the Quality Circle (QC) movement which started in Singapore in 1981 under the aegis of the government and later became a mass movement. In the early 2000s, the QC framework was substituted for a more advanced Innovation and Quality Circle (IQC) framework that was developed by Singaporean authorities to better promote innovative thinking and passion for creating new value among employees. Also in this case, a sophisticated certification system has been created. IQC operations of an organization are assessed by using a set of 10 criteria, and the certification itself has four award levels.

The key governmental players in the area of workplace innovation are the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING) and the Workforce Development Agency (WFA). Both agencies administer practically oriented programmes, many of which are funded from two funds. The Skills Development Fund (SDF) that was set up in 1979 is financed out of a tax levied on companies which have low(!) wage levels. The SDF is currently supplemented by the Lifelong Learning Endowment Fund, founded in 2001, which specifically supports various measures to increase the employability of the workforce. An example of such an initiative is the ADVANTAGE! scheme (2005-2010), which aims to encourage businesses to employ people over 40 or re-employ those over 62. Under this scheme, businesses can apply for grants for making changes in work scope and work processes for mature employees, cultural integration, wage restructuring, training employees and providing job placement services. ADVANTAGE!, like most other development programmes in Singapore, is designed to be a flexible and economical scheme from a business's point of view, combining different supporting

elements. In May 2007, more than 400 businesses of different sizes in various sectors had taken part.

The strategic foundation for workplace development in Singapore relies strongly on industrial policy thinking at the macro level. Though the labour market organizations play a role in many measures and support them actively, no distinct agenda-shaping development seems to have arisen from the country's system of IR. Singaporean approach is inclusive by its nature, i.e. the approach strives to cover a large proportion of the country's workforce and businesses. This inclusiveness, however, is founded more on competitiveness thinking than on commitment to equality thinking or improving employee participation as such. The tools available clearly encourage self-regulated development of workplaces and, to some extent also, the use of outside consultants, whereas the role of universities or research institutes is practically non-existing. Currently, the force driving workplace development seems to be direct dialogue between government agencies and companies.

4.4 South Korea

In the 1950s, after the Korean War, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in Asia. At present South Korea, which has 49 million inhabitants, is the world's 13th largest economic giant and a leading country in many industrial sectors. The country's rapid industrialisation started under state leadership after a military coup in 1961. The military dictatorship fell in 1987, after which the tight bond between the state and family-owned conglomerates (chaebol) has also loosened. South Korea's rapid growth was abruptly cut by the economic crisis of 1997 and then the country was forced to turn to the International Monetary Fund. Subsequently, rapid growth has again continued. Despite its reputation as the world's most connected information society, strong traditional values, emphasising, among others, harmony, obedience and collectiveness, are still present in working life. The country is also governed by a long working hours culture: the average annual work time is clearly longest among the OECD countries. In South Korea, burnout and a large amount of occupational accidents are serious problems related to long work hours (Kim/Kim 2003; Rowley/Bae 2002; 2004).

The Ministry of Labour established the New Paradigm Centre (NPC) in 2004 as an affiliate with the Korea Labour Institute. The main task of the NPC is to provide professional consulting services for the successful implementation of advanced human-oriented labour and welfare policy at the enterprise level. Of the NPC's consulting services, the most important is the New Paradigm Programme (NPP), which is directed at simultaneous improvement of the work system and lifelong learning system of companies and public sector organizations (Lee/Lee 2008). The "old paradigm" in South Korea refers to companies seeking a competitive advantage by an intensive work pace, long hours and a low level of pay. The "new paradigm", meanwhile, refers to a development in which companies shorten work hours such that this creates for employees more free time and more time to learn and train at work. In this way a company's competitiveness increases and employment in the country improves. The shortening of work hours is typically achieved by renewal of the work shift system, technological and organizational change, and without lowering of the level of pay. The new paradigm also includes an expanded view of learning. Unlike with the old paradigm, learning is thought of a continuous, lifelong process, which relates to everyday problem solving at work, which covers all employees, and which also concerns matters other than the knowledge and skills directly linked to an employee's own work task. In South Korea, an icon of the new paradigm has been consumer products maker Yuhan-Kimberly, whose achieved reforms initially inspired policy makers to establish the NPC.

By September 2008, 255 company and public sector organizations had taken part in the NPP. About half of the participating organizations were under 100 people in size. The projects are realised as a five-stage development process, in which the NPC consultant's task is to help the client company's own design team to identify development targets itself, to find solutions and to make the necessary changes both in the work system and in the lifelong learning system. The solution often contains the establishment of new teams to shift work, either by increasing the workforce or by carrying out technological or organizational changes. Thus, simultaneously, the work time of individual employees could be shortened and equipment operation rate or service hours lengthened. Part of the freed up work time is used for

the training of employees, which is carried out regularly within the work shift system. Often, the training is not strictly professional: part of it might apply to family life, for example, or to skills needed in leisure time.

State power is clearly a core actor in workplace development in South Korea and labour market organizations, R&D units and intermediary bodies have not had a significant role. The NPP is guided primarily by industrial policy objectives, such as the old paradigm's inability to respond to the challenge of China and other Asian countries that have a low level of costs. On the other hand, the programme includes a holistic mutual gains perspective between the company, the employees and society as a whole. In its manner of approach, the NPP is design-oriented and inclusive. The programme aims to support small businesses in particular, in which work times are typically longer and both terms of employment and working conditions are clearly poorer than in larger companies. The intention is also to improve opportunities for employee participation by developing cooperation between management and staff: an objective that is nevertheless affected by the fact that employees in small firms are often not unionised. The programme also aims to strengthen development infrastructure by educating new consultants. The NPC has founded a lifetime learning club, to which all participating companies have been admitted, and the Centre has made several appraisals of the projects' results. However, for now, the programme does not include a very clear strategy for promoting horizontal networking. The Ministry of Labour has a strong faith in the programme. Its purpose is to significantly increase the programme's resources and expand the development concept from the model inspired by Yuhan-Kimberly to a more general model for "high-performance workplace innovation". As an indication of this, the Centre was renamed in 2009 as the Korean Workplace Innovation Network.

5. Summary

Table 1 summarizes the main features of the four national strategies by using the six principles included in the Naschold model as the framework for comparison.

Table 1: Profiles of four national workplace development strategies in comparison

	Finland	Ireland	Singapore	South Korea
Policy context	Originally IR, but increasingly linked to industrial policy framework through Tekes	IR, but also linked to industrial policy framework through the NWS and Enterprise Ireland	Exclusively industrial policy framework	Industrial policy framework, but also integrated with a holistic IR-related mutual gains perspective
Orientation	Mainly national	Mainly international	Mainly international	Mainly national
Participation	Inclusive process-oriented approach with strong direct staff participation	Exclusive design-oriented approach with medium-level staff participation	Highly inclusive and design-oriented approach with low-level staff participation	Inclusive design-oriented approach with low/medium-level staff participation
Infrastructure I=industry C=consulting U=university	Fostering I-C-U cooperation in development: researcher education and training are explicit aims	Focusing on I-C cooperation, which is only indirectly supported by research data	Focusing on in-house development that is supported by consulting if needed	Fostering I-C cooperation in development is an explicit aim: research data plays an indirect supportive role
Horizontal networking	Direct (learning networks) and indirect (seminars, publications, data banks) support	Comprehensive indirect support, also including training, case studies and campaigns	Indirect support through positive publicity given to the winning of certifications and awards	Indirect support through NPC-sponsored club, case studies, project assessments and data banks
Resources	Strong in terms of funding, time structure and overall social capital in society	Strong in terms of institutional basis, but rather weak in terms of funding and time structure	Strong in terms of funding, time structure and institutional basis	Still rather modest, but getting stronger in terms of funding, time structure and institutional basis

Among the strategies, there are significant differences in all six dimensions. In the following, each strategy reflected in the model is first sketched out briefly. After this, the differences between European and East Asian strategies are examined in more detail, in the light of the viewpoints presented in the introduction.

The Finnish TYKES programme started within the IR framework, but it is now also increasingly integrated as part of industrial and innovation policy. The Finnish strategy includes elements of both process and design orientation; process orientation is, however, dominant, as development projects rely strongly on collaborative local processes and direct staff participation. Another difference in the Finnish strategy compared with the three others is that fostering cooperation between universities, consultants and workplaces is an explicit aim. This probably reflects the stronger role that action research plays in the Nordic countries (Aagaard Nielsen/Svensson 2006; Gustavsen 2007). Company-to-company networking is promoted, in addition to conventional indirect means (e.g. seminars, publications and data banks), also directly as an in-built element in the learning network projects.

The Irish case is especially interesting owing to its strong political backing. The Workplace Innovation Fund was unveiled in 2007 as part of a broader strategy, which forms an integrated and coherent approach to workplace development. The strategy is supported by a nationally unique social partnership framework and a strong institutional nexus of government agencies. The critical aspects of the approach adopted in Ireland concern its narrow target group (export-oriented SMEs), lack of a research element in the projects and meagre resources reserved for promoting horizontal networking between companies besides the comprehensive, but yet rather conventional, tools for disseminating "good practice". The Irish approach can be described as an evolving process that is still at the beginning of its learning curve.

In Singapore, workforce and workplace development are an integrated part of a broader political framework for building a growth pattern based on a new kind of innovation infrastructure. Overall, the investments made in this area and the results achieved through these investments are impressive. One may, however, ask how well a highly design-oriented approach based firmly on following standards and "best practices", such as the PD and IQC frame-

work, will work in an environment that moves faster, is less predictable and offers less continuity. In such an environment, more constructive approaches that underline the need to learn from difference and diversity may be needed. Another important challenge in Singapore concerns the meagre, or even non-existent, role played by research in support of workplace development.

The South Korean strategy in workplace development is more home-grown than in the case of the other countries. The strategy is firmly rooted in the industrial policy framework laid down by the government, yet including a holistic IR-related view on mutual gains by companies, employees and society. The strategy is design oriented and inclusive, and it aims to increase the pool of experts. Workplace development is, however, at least so far, understood only in terms of consulting with no role reserved for research other than providing retrospective evaluation data on project results. Important challenges for the future include finding more efficient means to promote the exchange of information and mutual learning between companies and expanding the development concept itself, which has so far been based on the Yuhan-Kimberly model and a highly structured, five-staged process of change.

6. Alternative paths? Policy learning in comparative perspective

In the introduction, it was assumed that the different role of the state in European and East Asian countries is probably also reflected as differences in workplace development. This assumption is confirmed by empirical analysis. However, in *all* the countries examined, the relationships between the state and labour market organizations in workplace development strategies have bases that clearly differ.

In South Korea, state power is in fact the only key institutional actor in the New Paradigm Programme. The role of state power is exceptionally strong, when compared internationally, because consultants employed by a state institution take part in the change process themselves. An attempt can be made to understand such a strong state role in three ways. Firstly, in the country, in recent decades, there has been a strong tradition of state intervention. Secondly, the advancement of workplace innovations and an improve-

ment in the quality of working life have only become items of political interest in recent years. In the country, there is a lack of consultants in this area. The NPC, for its part, fills this lack and, besides its own consulting activity, it also trains consultants. The universities and research institutes are not able to fill this lack, since there is generally little R&D cooperation between them and companies in the country (Kotilainen 2005; Lee 2006) The third reason links to the fact that, in South Korea, there is still little tradition of cooperation in development between management and staff – let alone between a company and trade unions. In consulting by the NPC, it is expressly assumed that the staff also participates in the planning and implementation of projects within companies.

In Singapore, also, the directive role of the government is particularly strong. There, unlike in South Korea, tripartite cooperation is a long-standing tradition, but labour market organizations have long been integrated into the government machinery formed by the dominant PAP party (People's Action Party). According to Leggett (2007), the system of IR in Singapore is, in practice, merged with the government-led system of manpower planning. An appropriate example of the particularly central role of the state in supporting workplace innovations is the Quality Circle movement, which started in 1981 as part of a wider productivity movement, and which has continued in the 2000s under the Innovation and Quality Circle framework. In Singapore, the QC/IQC movement has been based on government-initiated mass mobilisation to improve the country's productivity and competitiveness while again in Japan, for example, which acts as a role model for Singapore, the motivating force behind the mobilisation has been a professional association, the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (Cole 1989).

In Finland, also, there has been a long tradition of tripartite cooperation between the government power and labour market organizations (Lilja 1998). Although the TYKES Programme began as part of a government programme prepared by the Ministry of Labour, private, municipal and state sector labour market organizations have from the start been groups with a central influence over the programme. A mutual understanding about the programme's laid out objectives and execution has long dominated among labour market organizations. This is more a reflection of the fact that the research and innovation

policy followed by Finland has in recent years generally been supported by a strong national consensus than an indication of the integration of labour market organizations into the state machinery in the same way as in, for example, Singapore.

The first social partnership agreement in Ireland was created in 1987 when the country was in the middle of what many described as an economic and societal crisis. The first agreements were by nature reactive and focused on dealing with the crisis. Recent agreements are more proactive. The creation of the NWS is directly linked to this development, as was the founding of the NCPP that preceded its creation. Choosing social partnership as the means to avert the crisis was not at all self-evident, nor was it obvious that it would continue to the present day; it has been a strategic choice by the key collective actors made possible by the pragmatic characteristics of the country's political parties and labour market organizations and the close-knit networks and social capital among the actors. The social partnership in Ireland is, when compared internationally, a unique frame of reference: it is horizontally "thick" (i.e. the farming sector and the community and voluntary sector are involved), but vertically "thin" (i.e. it is not automatically manifested at the company level). Many non-unionised companies have voluntarily followed the pay norms laid out in the social partnership contract (Baccaro/Simoni 2007; Hastings et al. 2007) and most of the partnership systems in companies are based on *unofficial* standing practices (Williams et al. 2004). The NWS and the WIF can be seen as a pragmatic joint initiative by the government, employers' associations and trade unions to promote micro-level partnership with soft, persuasive measures in line with the voluntarist tradition of the Irish system of IR, similar to those that have been promoted in many other countries *both* via workplace development programmes *and* through legislation and agreements between the social partners.

Common to the four countries examined is the opinion that public support for the advancement of workplace innovations is based on their positive effect on productivity and competitiveness. Such an opinion, in and of itself, might already be considered as progressive: many recent economic and historical analyses show that workplace innovations are as important as a source of economic growth as technological innovations (e.g. Corrado et al.

2005; Freeman/Louçã 2001; Perez 2002; Sanidas 2005). Nevertheless, questions arise: does only a narrow economic imperative guide public support to the advancement of workplace innovations or does the support, at the same time, also include aspirations to further the quality of working life, and how linear or interactive is the prevailing learning concept behind the support? For example, Naschold (1994) was not very interested in these kinds of questions, which caused him at the start of the 1990s to raise Japan – without much criticism – to be something of a model for others. One could state, with arguments developed in greater detail elsewhere (e.g. Fricke 1997; Pålshaugen 2002), that improvements in the quality of working life in terms of, for example, human-oriented design of work and technology, learning opportunities at work and broad employee participation, even *beyond* immediate economic benefits are an important prerequisite for a long-term innovativeness and sustainability of any major working life reform.

Nevertheless, a mechanical comparison between different countries is in this case not necessarily very fruitful. Each of the four countries has a history that clearly deviates from that of the others. From the point of view of policy learning, it might be more fruitful to compare each country's strategy in relationship to its *own* earlier historical development and to aim to analyse, in the light of this, how radical are the strategy choices that have been made. This is, however a demanding task. A subsequent examination has to be understood as a number of hypotheses that are hoped to give future impetus to discussion of the preconditions and limits for policy learning in different national and regional contexts.[1]

South Korea's strategy has the most radical aim for working life reform inbuilt. The old and new paradigms are explicitly based on a different work and learning system in the workplace. A radical feature can be considered to be the aim to promote cooperation in development between management and staff (and local trade unions) in a country in which the system of IR – and social life in general – are marked by a low trust (Lee 2006). Less radical is consideration of how strong and direct is the role of state power in develop-

[1] For an earlier discussion on learning within and from national working life programmes, see IJAR, 4(1+2).

ment intervention. The Ministry of Labour has the intention to widen the activity of the NPC in the coming years. Nevertheless, from the point of view of policy learning, a more important question is how will expansion of the development concept itself from the Yuhan-Kimberly model towards a Korean "high-performance workplace innovation" model succeed and how will workplace development, in the future and also outside the state machinery, give birth to new innovation centres.

Singapore's workplace development strategy can also be examined as part of a wider economic growth strategy, which has as its core a transition from an investment-driven model towards an innovation-driven model. One strength of Singapore's workplace development strategy has been the ability of state power to mobilise institutions, organizations and individuals to act in accordance with the strategies it has laid out. Probably, few countries have succeeded in this as well. It is, however, an open question how such a strategy based so strongly on linear learning would work in a situation in which the operating context becomes more difficult to control. In Singapore workplace development is guided by the underlying idea of the necessity of a paradigm change but, at least on the basis of the three entities under examination (PD, the IQC programme and the ADVANTAGE! scheme), it is still difficult to see how, at the programme level, this will be realised as a new approach that is based on a more constructive and more interactive concept of learning.

Finland's strategy can be described as more reformist than radical. The Workplace Development Programme was already established in 1995 on the basis of the argument that workplace development is part of the national innovation system (Tripartite Expert Group 1996). However, only with the preparation in 2007-2008 of a national innovation strategy and the transfer of the TYKES programme to Tekes can the promotion of workplace innovation in Finland be considered to have obtained a generally recognised position as part of the national innovation system. In Finland, in recent years, the content of innovation policy has changed more than workplace development strategy itself. The central features of the "Finnish model for workplace development" as represented by the TYKES programme have been synergy between the advancement of productivity and the quality of working life, active coopera-

tion between management and staff with augmenting of the local learning process, furtherance of the interaction between researchers and consultants, and a wide coverage by sector. From a policy learning point of view, the key questions are what kind of springboard this type of model offers for responding to future challenges and, particularly, how workplace development takes up a position in the future conceptually, institutionally and in financial terms, as part of the government's new national innovation strategy that contains the idea of "broad-based innovation policy".

Ireland's strategy can also be characterised as reformative. The strategy, comprising the National Workplace Strategy and its component the Workplace Innovation Fund, is the most short-lived, but at the same time the most explicitly designed. Because of the country's own traditions, more emphasis is put on softer methods and less on direct economic stimuli unlike in other country's strategies. It is still difficult to assess the Irish strategy's performance. It is also still difficult at this stage to talk in particular about "Irish model for workplace development": in the National Workplace Strategy, the nine characteristics of the workplace of the future that are distinguished are abstract and generic illustrations. As with Finland, the common challenge to Ireland is how workplace innovations will be positioned in the future as a part of innovation policy. A particular challenge to Ireland's strategy, which would require new thinking that is more radical than at present, is to find a method that would show how the social partnership could be mainstreamed to act as a dynamic force that also accelerates changes in working life at the workplace level.

7. Concluding remarks

Singaporean and South Korean policy makers and programme agencies are actively monitoring working life reforms adopted in other industrialized countries for the sake of benchmarking. But what could their European counterparts learn from the experiences of these two East Asian countries? One striking feature of both national strategies is that working life reform is explicitly considered as an aspect of a wider paradigm shift. This aim finds its utmost expression in the case of South Korea (from "old" to "new" para-

digm), but it is clearly built in Singapore's strategy as well (from an investment-driven model towards an innovation-driven model). As stated above, in both cases, this shift would call for changes in the currently state-led developmental approaches by reinforcing the role played by different intermediary organizations in the programmes.

Those European countries, in which workplace development initiatives have been carried out in recent years, are probably a cut above their East Asian counterparts in terms of the diversity of innovation centres found in the countries. On the other hand, and in contrast to the "paradigm shift" approach of Singapore and South Korea, working life reforms in European countries have so far been fairly fragmented, suffering from their poor integration with wider strategies for industrial change and economic growth. Both Finland's and Ireland's workplace development strategies show some elements of such an integration, but it may be still too early to take that as an indication of a permanent policy change in either case.

As an expansion to Naschold's original model, the article suggests that more attention should be paid to the role of intellectual and social resources (in addition to material resources) attached to programmes as a success factor for national strategies for workplace development and innovation. To overcome the problems of fragmentation and poor integration, as shown above, new programme activities in European countries would need, above all, closer dialogue between the different innovation centres in society and new boundary objects to pave the way for the emergence of inspiring and integrative visions and development concepts based on this dialogue. Whether, for example, the increased demands for better social and ecological sustainability of work systems and economic development at large will form an umbrella for such integrative visions in the future, remains to be seen.

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